
REPORT
OF
Principals Vance & Mackay
ON THE
School System
OF
VANCOUVER

To the Members of the

Board of Trustees of Vancouver:

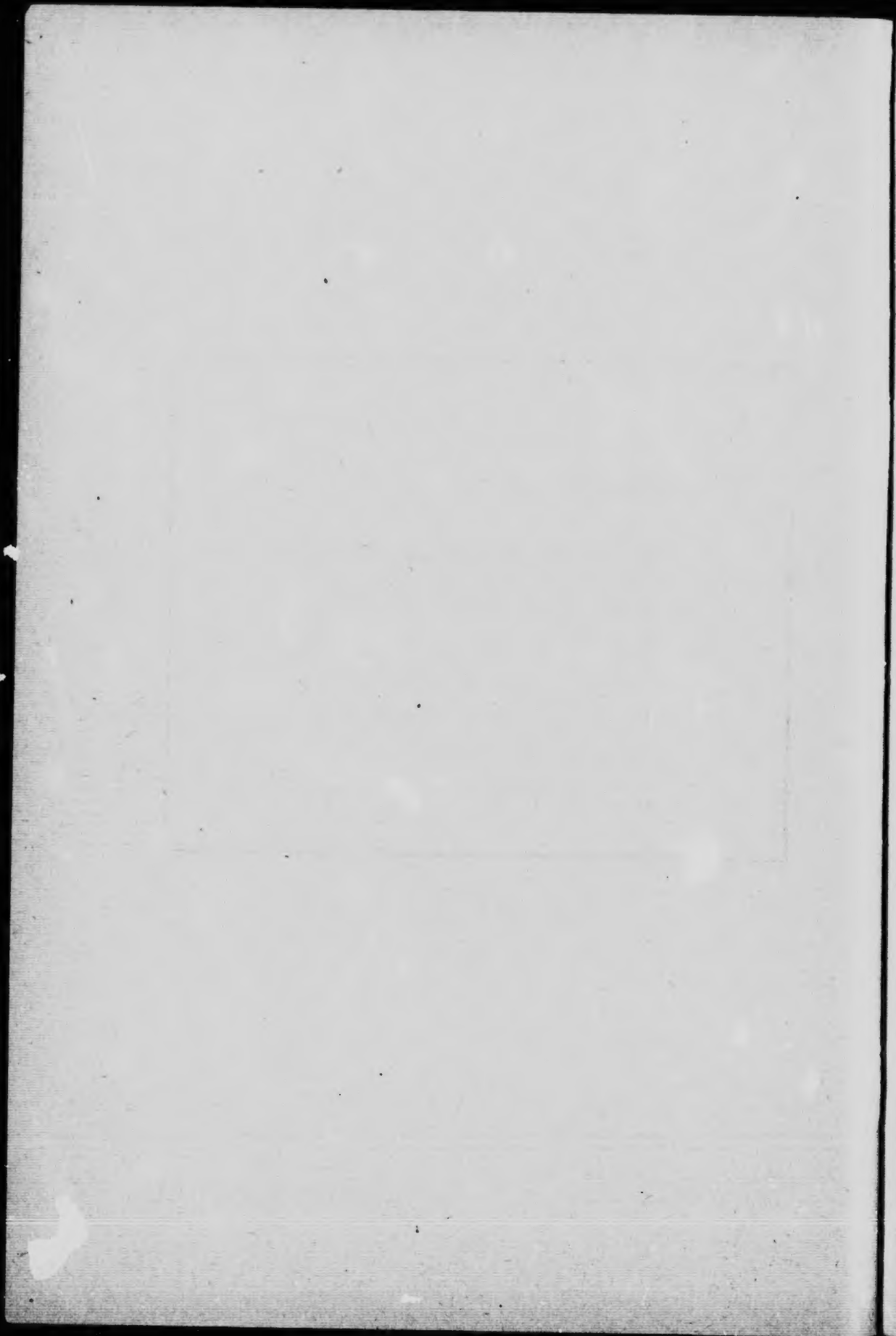
*We beg to present herewith our unanimous report
regarding the efficiency of the School System of
Vancouver.*

W. H. VANCE.

JOHN MACKAY.

Vancouver, B. C.,

December 18th, 1917.



"That Principal W. H. Vance and Dr. John Mackay be requested to inquire as to the efficiency of the school system of the City and report their findings to the School Board; that for this purpose they have access to all the schools of the City, the records of the Board, and be empowered to cause to appear before them any officials of the Board, Principals or Teachers, and that the Secretary and Municipal Inspector and their staff render such assistance as they may desire; and further, that the Special Committee already appointed in connection with this matter render all assistance to Principal Vance and Dr. Mackay as they may request." (Minutes of School Board, August 21, 1917.)

COURSE OF INQUIRY

In accordance with the above resolution we have enquired into various phases of the School System of the City of Vancouver, the inquiry proceeding along the following lines:—

1. Advertisements were inserted in the daily papers, announcing public sessions of the inquiry, when all who wished to do so might testify regarding the City School System. Two sessions were held and some eighteen individuals gave evidence.

2. A circular letter was sent to all the teachers on the pay roll, asking for their opinion of the System and suggestions as to its improvement. Some fifty-three letters were received in reply, some of them being personal letters and others representing the considered judgment of the whole staff of the school.

3. Personal interviews were held with five of the Trustees, the Municipal Inspector, the Secretary-Treasurer, the Auditor the Medical Officer, the Building Superintendent, the Physical Supervisor and thirty-four teachers, including all the High School Principals and the Principals of the leading Public Schools.

4. Letters were sent to School Board officials in thirteen representative cities in Canada and the United States, asking for information on some thirty points which had come up for discussion during the Enquiry.

We are pleased to report that in every case the information desired for was readily given.

Having weighed the evidence thus secured, we beg to report as follows:

I.—EFFICIENCY.

1. *Public Schools:*

A comparison of the examination results in Vancouver with those in centres of the Province shows a good average of efficiency in the local Public Schools. Our examination of other phases of the system confirms this impression.

2. High Schools:

(a) King George High School ranks high among similar institutions in the Province.

(b) Britannia falls somewhat below the average in examination results, but the morale of the school seems good and measures are being taken to increase its efficiency.

(c) King Edward High School ranks low in the percentage of passes secured and in general tone and discipline. In regard to this school the following facts must be taken into consideration.

It has attained its very large proportions within a few years; it has been used as an experimental station for new departures in education; it has been a training ground for Principals for several High Schools in the neighborhood, and it has not only been doing the work of an ordinary High School but also of a Commercial and Technical School. After making full allowance for all these factors, we are driven to the conclusion that radical changes must be made before this school plays the part in the educational life of the community which its size and importance warrant.

RECOMMENDATIONS.

We therefore recommend:

- (1). The complete re-organization of the staff.
- (2). Placing the Commercial and Technical Departments under a separate head with, the purpose of establishing a Commercial and Technical High School at the earliest possible date. The latter should not be merely a business college to fit pupils for immediate employment, but should aim to give the broadest possible culture combined with the necessary technical skill which is requisite for useful citizenship.

II. MUNICIPAL INSPECTOR.

As is natural in a large system the Municipal Inspector has his critics, but we are satisfied that he has the confidence of the great majority of the teachers under him and of the School Board. It is, however, quite impossible for any man in his position to do his best work under existing circumstances. He is expected to administer the school system of the City on its educational side; he has 384 rooms to inspect and in addition to this, he has been doing a great deal of work which does not naturally come within the scope of a Municipal Inspector's duties. The result of all this has been a dissipation of his energies at the expense of inspection of the schools. To quote Mr. Gordon, in a report submitted to us:

"Since taking up my present duties I have endeavored to make at least two regular visits to each school room in the Schools during the school year—one each term. I have never regarded these visits as formal inspections, for they have necessarily been too short to permit of my testing classes in various subjects to ascertain their standing."

and again:

"Such notes as I have made on my observations in the Schools have to be written down hurriedly in my office, worked in between telephone calls or between interviews with people who have a right to feel agrieved if an interview were denied them."

RECOMMENDATIONS.

1. We recommend that all correspondence of the Board, the keeping of the minutes of committees, the making up of pay roll, etc., should be transferred to the Secretary-Treasurer, and the whole time of the Municipal Inspector given to the educational work of the Board.

2. He should be relieved of the work of directing the Night School. This work should be placed in charge of a Supervisor. The time and strength of the Municipal Inspector should be wholly given to the study of modern methods and the inspecting and directing of the large and important educational force represented by the nearly four hundred teachers in the schools of the city.

III. INSPECTION.

In view of the many changes in the personnel of the teaching staff each term and the size and fluctuating character of the attendance in many of the schools, there is not enough inspection and supervision to secure the best results. We have already referred to the inspection by the Municipal Inspector. That the Departmental Inspection is inadequate is shown by the following facts submitted by Mr. Gordon.

1. "The Provincial Inspectors of both the High and Public Schools used to be asked to report each term on each teacher. Last year they were not able to do so."

2. "The number of High School teachers now in the Province is nearly two hundred and there is only one Inspector. He finds it impossible to visit each class and thoroughly inspect it twice a year. Consequently, Vancouver cannot depend on a semi-annual inspection of each of its High School classes."

3. "A year ago there were three Provincial Inspectors for Vancouver, Burnaby, Point Grey, Delta and Richmond; this year there are only two, though the school population is much greater. Consequently, some of our Public Schools were not inspected last term and it is possible some may not be this term."

RECOMMENDATIONS.

We recommend:

(1). That the Department be asked to increase the number of Inspectors for Vancouver.

(2). That Miss Berry be relieved from teaching in order to give her whole time to supervision in Domestic Science and, in addition to the present Supervisors of Manual Training, Primary Work, Music and Physical Instruction, that Supervisors of Junior, Intermediate and Night School work be appointed.

IV. APPOINTMENTS OF TEACHERS.

1. We believe that no one should be appointed to the teaching staff who has not either had Normal Training or a successful teaching experience. At the present time there are twenty-nine teachers on the staff who have merely academic standing.

2. More elasticity should be allowed in the salary schedule. Capable and experienced teachers are not attracted by the present minimum salary.

3. Promotions ought to be based primarily on ability not in seniority, as is too often the case at present.

4. The minimum salary of \$60.00 per month for grade teachers is too low in view of the present cost of living.

5. If Principals are to be held responsible for the success of their schools they should be given fuller control over the members of their staffs and should be consulted to a greater degree than at present in regard to appointments, promotions and dismissals.

V. CORRELATION.

From the opportunities we have had of studying the situation we feel that the teachers as a whole are well equipped for, and interested in their work. But we found a very marked lack of esprit de corps among them. There is too great a tendency all along the line to look upon suggestions or criticisms as being in the nature of a personal attack, with the result that there does not seem to be that spirit of hearty co-operation and good-fellowship between the teachers and the educational authorities which is absolutely necessary to secure the best results. The same thing is noticeable in the relations of teachers to parents. There have been cases where parents have abused their privileges in regard to criticism and consultation, but this should not prevent much closer contact between parents and teachers generally, and suggestions from the parents ought not to be resented by the teachers, as they too often are.

RECOMMENDATIONS.

We would recommend:

1. That, so soon as the Municipal Inspector is relieved of his excessive duties, he make it a point to come into closer and more sympathetic relations with all the teachers, in order to guide them in their reading and thinking on educational matters.

2. That a Special Teachers' Library, containing the latest books and magazines on educational questions be provided either by the School Board or as a department of the Carnegie Library.

3. That teachers be encouraged to familiarize themselves with the needs of their pupils in the matter of general readings and that the Board provide

either separate libraries in the various schools, or co-operate with the Carnegie Library in providing a Children's Section in the various Branch Libraries in the City.

The aim of the school system should be to guide, as far as possible, the whole mental life of the children, both in the regular subjects of the curriculum and in general reading.

4. That the formation of Parent-Teachers Associations be encouraged and that the best intelligence among the teachers be given to guiding this movement in helpful and wholesome channels.

VI. COURSES OF STUDY.

1. *Public Schools.*

We consider that the course of study in the Public Schools is not well balanced and tends to place too great emphasis on the training of memory rather than all round development. It is the practically unanimous opinion of the Principals of the schools that in literature too much detailed knowledge is required; that the ground covered in history is too great, and that the requirements in geography are more than should be expected of Public School children, with the result that cramming is resorted to and children are trained in memorization rather than in independent thought.

2. *High Schools.*

In the High Schools the same criticism applies. The attempt is made to do as much in three years as is ordinarily done in four, with the result that a premium is placed upon cramming at the expense of real education, and the University Professors find matriculants imperfectly prepared for their work, while those students not proceeding to the University, enter their life's work severely handicapped.

The tendency of the whole system has been too largely to train for the teaching profession and matriculation into the University. It is not sufficiently elastic to give the best training to those who do not intend taking these courses.

RECOMMENDATION.

We would recommend that the Board memorialize the Department of Education with a view to having the High School course lengthened from three to four years, and making more provision for the thorough training of those who do not intend to enter the teaching profession or proceed to the University, and that the defects in the Public School course referred to be remedied.

VII. HOME WORK.

With a course of study which tends to produce an over emphasis on memorization it is natural that a good deal of importance should be attached to home work. We feel that for a large proportion of the children in our schools the home work is altogether too heavy.

RECOMMENDATIONS.

1. We would strongly urge that the course of study be so modified as to reduce home work to a minimum.
2. In the meantime arrangements should be made among teachers in individual schools to prevent children being assigned home work in too many subjects in one evening.
3. Principals should satisfy themselves that in assigning home work teachers confine it to review, and the working out of principles already dealt with in class.

VIII. EXAMINATIONS.

While examinations are necessary, their importance is greatly over emphasized in the Province of British Columbia. The effect on teachers is extremely injurious. The knowledge that their reputation and progress depend upon the number passed at examination tempts them to adopt those methods which will best secure examination results, whether or not they are educationally sound and in the best interests of the children. Children, too, come to look upon cramming for examinations as the purpose of education and believe that when they have passed their examinations, by whatever means, their education is completed. The result on the life of the child is bound to be most harmful. This process fails to produce any serious effort for the acquisition of knowledge and makes impossible the spontaneous development of the whole personality, which should be the purpose of all education. There is a strong feeling among the teachers of city that they are hampered in their work and the children are injured in this over emphasis upon examination results.

For this condition the Vancouver educational authorities are not primarily to blame, except in so far as they have a tendency to adopt too largely the attitude of the Department of Education towards the subject of examinations.

RECOMMENDATIONS.

We would recommend:

1. That the Municipal Inspector, in co-operation with the Principals of the various schools, satisfy himself more fully than has been the case in the past as to the factors other than examination results entering into the work of individual teachers.
2. That teachers should be encouraged to seek the broadest possible development of their pupils and to make examination results but secondary considerations in their work.

IX. RETARDED PUPILS.

We are glad to note that the Municipal Inspector is fully alive to the importance of special treatment for retarded or backward pupils; that the Board has agreed to appoint a psychologist for the study of such cases and that it is

intended ultimately that separate rooms, or a separate building, shall be set apart for these pupils.

In the meantime we would recommend that special consideration be given such pupils at promotion that they may not be kept in lower grades until they have reached an age where they feel so out of place that they become discouraged and drop out.

X. DISTRACTIONS.

The efficiency of the schools, especially of the High Schools, undoubtedly suffers from the lack of home discipline, which seems to characterize the present age. Children are allowed too much freedom in attending moving picture shows and in going out to various forms of entertainment, too often on the streets. No growing child can dissipate its energies in this way and be capable of doing satisfactory work in school. The period during which children can attend school is necessarily limited, and if full advantage is to be taken of it, parents owe it to their children to see that their hours of recreation are spent in such a way as to increase rather than diminish their nervous energy.

XI. MEDICAL DEPARTMENT.

The Board is to be congratulated on the provision it has made for the medical care of the teachers and children under its charge. This Department is deserving of commendation. We would, however, recommend that the head of the Department be consulted to a larger degree than at present in the appointments to and the dismissals from his staff.

1. *Morality.*

While a certain amount of morality is to be expected in so large and diversified a body of growing young people, we believe that every reasonable precaution is being taken, both by the Medical staff and the teachers in the various schools, to cope with the situation. We deprecate most strongly the exaggerated reports which from time to time have gained currency as to the amount of immorality in the schools of the city. Those having knowledge of any facts bearing upon this situation will receive the most sympathetic and serious consideration on reporting to the Municipal Inspector, the Medical Officer, or any of the teachers.

At the same time we wish to impress upon all parents the necessity for cautioning their children with regard to the dangers which menace them in any large community, and for giving such instruction in the facts of life as will safeguard them from morbid or degrading suggestions from others.

The Medical Officer and his staff are doing all in their power to safeguard our young people in this regard, but the ultimate responsibility must be thrown upon the parents.

2. *Sanitation.*

The Sanitary conditions of the schools seem to be, on the whole, fairly satisfactory. The Board is aware of the defects which exist and is having them remedied as rapidly as funds will allow.

3. *Ventilation.*

The ventilation in the newer schools is satisfactory. In many of the older schools it is far from satisfactory. The Board, however, is alive to the existing defects and is remedying them as rapidly as finances will permit.

XII. PHYSICAL TRAINING.

We cannot too strongly emphasize the importance of physical training in relation to the complete development of the child. The provisions made under the Strathcona Trust are exceedingly helpful and are intelligently applied under the direction of the Supervisor of Physical Training.

We recommend that as soon as possible this Department be further developed along the following lines:

1. A Gymnasium should be provided for each High School.
2. A Woman Supervisor of Physical Training should be provided for the girls in the Senior Department of the Public Schools and in the High Schools.
3. The supervised play grounds should be re-established.

XIII. THE SCHOOL BOARD.

Our enquiry has been chiefly concerned with the work of the Board for the present year. It has convinced us that serious and capable attention has been given to the work committed to the Board, and that the work done is worthy of commendation.

While the prominence of some members of the Board in political organizations may have led to the suspicion that politics played a part in its work, we are glad to be able to report that there is no evidence of such influence in the work of the Board for this year.

It is evident, however, that members of the Board have not worked together in perfect harmony. This fact, and the undue publicity given to it in the press, tended to destroy the confidence of the public in the Board, and, to some extent, reacted on the efficiency of the schools under its care.

We are strongly convinced that undue public criticism destroys the confidence of parents and teachers alike in those who have the direction of educational matters.

We would recommend that the greatest care be taken in the selection of the Membership of the Board, and that when elected, they should receive cordial and sympathetic support from all classes of the community.

While it is necessary that at least some members of the Board should have business experience and marked executive ability, it is essential that a considerable proportion of the Board should always consist of educationalists, or those who have had experience and training in the work of education.

We commend to the attention of the Board a system which is being adopted in many of the leading cities of the continent; the abolition of committees, and the dealing with all business by the full Board.

We believe that the Board should be guided more largely by the Municipal Inspector in all matters affecting education, and by the other experts in its employ, regarding their several departments.

Appeals to individual trustees by employees of the Board, or others, should be discouraged, and all appeals dealt with by the full Board, and by it alone.

We find that the practice of asking for detailed information on various points by individual Trustees has, in some cases, entailed days of extra work in the Department concerned, and we would recommend that all special reports be asked for only on motion of the Board.

We cannot too strongly recommend that those occupying the position of trustees should keep their private business absolutely clear of their official duties.

* * * * *

XIV. DEPARTMENTAL INFLUENCE.

It is impossible to deal with all the factors which bear upon the efficiency of the school system of Vancouver without considering the Department of Education at Victoria.

While admitting the many good features of the educational system of the Province, and the Department at Victoria, we feel that Vancouver City Schools can never attain the maximum efficiency until certain changes are made by the Department.

In the early stages of educational development of the Province it was necessary that a large measure of control be in the hands of the Superintendent of Education, but in a system so large and varied as our Provincial system has become, there must be less centralization.

We are glad to note that the present Superintendent, Dr. Alexander Robinson, has expressed his conviction that there must be greater flexibility in the Provincial system to secure the best results.

The necessity for this is evident from the following:

1. There appears to be an absolute lack of sympathy between the majority of the teachers and the Department.

2. The attitude assumed by the Department towards suggestions or criticisms in the past has produced the impression among the teachers that they are considered as attacks upon the Department and are either resented or ignored. The result is that teachers, for the most part, feel that it is not only idle to make suggestions, but that it is detrimental to their own interests, and many of them have settled down to the mere routine of their individual tasks without any sense of co-operation with the Department.

3. There is a widespread feeling among the teachers that the Board of Examiners is too much of a "Close Corporation," and utilizes only a small proportion of the ability of the profession with the results that it tends to fall into ruts.

RECOMMENDATIONS.

We commend the following points to the Board for discussion with the Department:

1. That at least one-third of the Board of Examiners should be changed each year, or that, in addition to the Board of Examiners, a Board of Associate Examiners should be established, one-third of the members to be changed each year.

2. That all papers should be set by a committee so that no one man's eccentricities may serve as a test of the work of pupils throughout the Province, and that no individual teacher may set and examine papers for his own class.

3. That the names of the examiners should appear on their paper.

4. That Departmental Inspections should be more frequent and a more sympathetic relation between the teachers and Inspectors cultivated.

5. That the main points of the Inspector's report, whether adverse or not, should be communicated to the teacher concerned.